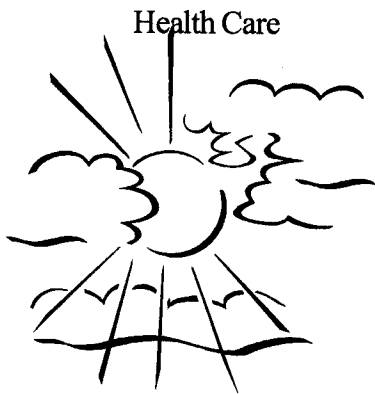


***Department
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Articles in Today's Clips

Wednesday, January 4, 2006

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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***Important story at this spot**

Granholm signs law letting whistleblowers stop Medicaid fraud

1/3/2006, 5:27 p.m. ET

The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Whistleblowers can sue a Medicaid provider on the state's behalf to fight fraud under legislation signed Tuesday by Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

The state attorney general could intervene in the lawsuit, and the person filing suit could receive up to 30 percent of a settlement.

Fraud costs the state between 3 percent and 10 percent of its annual \$8 billion Medicaid budget, which covers health care costs for more than 1.4 million low-income children, seniors, pregnant women and the disabled, according to estimates given to the Senate Fiscal Agency.

The law, backed by Attorney General Mike Cox, lets any person file a civil suit in the state's name to recover losses from Medicaid fraud. An employer is barred from firing, demoting, suspending or threatening an employee because he or she has sued or cooperated in a fraud investigation.

The legislation allows plaintiffs to get 15 percent to 25 percent of a settlement if the attorney general's office gets involved. Those who win a lawsuit without any help can receive 25 percent to 30 percent of the settlement.

The whistleblower bill is House Bill 4577.

On the Net:

Michigan Legislature: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

Governor signs law that protects, encourages Medicaid fraud whistleblowers

By Michelle Martinez

Jan. 03, 2006 5:06 PM

Gov. Jennifer Granholm on Tuesday signed legislation that provides protections and monetary incentives for Medicaid fraud whistleblowers. Under the new law, whistleblowers who bring forward successfully prosecuted Medicaid fraud claims will receive a portion of the recovered funds and cannot be penalized by their employers.

The governor said in a statement that the new law follows other measures to reduce the number of fraudulent claims including matching death records with Medicaid eligibility rolls and electronically verifying Medicaid eligibility with health care providers and Blue Cross Blue Shield.

“Many people who might find out about fraud would be worried about losing their jobs or other repercussions,” state Rep. David Law, R-Commerce Township, the original sponsor of the bill, said in a statement.

“Under this new law they have whistleblower protection, and if they have a valid claim, could receive a portion of the winnings. I am confident this new law will help save the state money.”

Michigan Medicaid pays \$8 billion a year to cover health care for about 1.5 million low-income residents. About \$10.4 million was recovered during the fiscal year 2003 from prosecuting fraud. But some studies suggest that fraudulent claims may amount to more than \$240 million a year.

The new law will help Michigan recover more of those dollars each year, Law said.

Thirteen other states, including Illinois and Indiana, have similar laws.

January 3, 2006

Governor Signs Bill to Combat Medicaid Fraud; Protect Whistleblowers

LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today signed legislation to further combat Medicaid fraud by providing incentives for citizens who suspect fraud against Michigan's Medicaid program to come forward and report it to authorities. The legislation is part of the Granholm administration's continuing efforts to eliminate fraud in the Michigan Medicaid program.

"This legislation will help us ensure that every taxpayer dollar is being spent wisely by providing the state with another valuable tool to detect and investigate Medicaid fraud," Granholm said. "When a citizen suspects Medicaid fraud, it benefits everyone if they can fearlessly report the wrongdoing and possibly be rewarded for their risks and efforts."

Public Act 337 (House Bill 4577) amends the Medicaid False Claim Act to allow any person to bring a civil action on the state's behalf to recover losses due to Medicaid fraud.

Under the law, employers are prohibited from penalizing employees who initiated, assisted, or participated in an investigation or court action under the Medicaid False Claim Act. As an incentive to encourage citizens to report suspected fraud, whistleblowers could be rewarded with a certain percentage of the recovered funds if the lawsuit is successful.

Michigan's Medicaid program pays \$8 billion total annually to deliver health care to nearly 1.5 million low-income Michigan residents. The Department of the Attorney General, which is responsible for Medicaid fraud investigations and prosecutions, reports fraud recoveries in fiscal year 2003-2004 to be \$10.4 million.

"It is absolutely imperative that we protect every penny of taxpayer money that is used to provide health care services to Michigan's most vulnerable citizens," said Granholm. "We have worked hard to provide an efficient, effective Medicaid program that leaves little room for fraud, but this bill allows us to use the invaluable help of Michigan's honest and hardworking citizens to ensure that Medicaid funding goes solely toward serving Michigan's citizens."

In addition to signing the new legislation, the Granholm administration has taken the following steps to ensure that every taxpayer dollar is being spent as it should:

- matching death records with Medicaid eligibility rolls, which is saving the state about \$5 million per year;
- electronic verification by health care providers and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Medicaid eligibility, which has reduced our costs in one year from \$450,000 to \$180,000;
- renewed a contract with Health Management Systems, Inc. (HMS) to provide revenue recovery and cost containment services for Michigan's Medicaid program. The contract extends a relationship between HMS and MDCH that dates back to 1994. In that period, HMS has recovered more than \$50 million for the state;
- hired four additional staff members to increase our surveillance on inappropriate billing; and,

- entered into an agreement with the Attorney General's (AG) Office that allows AG and DCH to work closely on Medicaid fraud issues.
- House Bill 4577 was sponsored by Representative David Law (R-Commerce Township).

January 4, 2006

Medicare drug plan gets mixed reviews

Some pharmacies say new benefit program is off to a good start, but some users are disappointed.

Kevin Freking / Associated Press

WASHINGTON -- Some patients using Medicare's new drug benefit reported difficulties Tuesday in filling prescriptions, although the government and some large pharmacies and nursing homes said the program was off to a good start.

The plan, estimated to cost the government \$724 billion over the next 10 years, will subsidize medicine costs for tens of millions of older Americans and the disabled.

Jack Silverman of Short Hills, N.J., visited his local Walgreens pharmacy first thing Sunday and tried to fill two prescriptions. He was stunned when the bill came back showing he owed twice what he had been paying -- \$255.52 instead of \$119.79.

Silverman said he knows there could be a good explanation for the bill, which he declined to pay. But he could not reach anybody Sunday or Monday associated with the federal government or his insurance provider who could take his call.

"I'm really disappointed the system didn't take into consideration that Sunday was New Year's Day and Monday was also a holiday," Silverman said. "People who really needed their medication could have been at a loss."

Officials were most concerned about ensuring that 6.2 million people previously getting their medicine through Medicaid were in the new program. The "dual-eligible" population is generally frail and has extensive medication needs.

Bruce Roberts, CEO of the National Community Pharmacists Association, said that pharmacies often had trouble determining on Sunday and Monday whether their dual-eligible customers were enrolled in the new program. However, the problem was easing Tuesday.

"We knew it was going to be difficult," Roberts said. "But people are getting their medicine, and that is the bottom line."

Pharmacists have a hectic day when drug plan starts

Tuesday was first time many seniors could pick up prescriptions

Wednesday, January 04, 2006

BY SCOTT ANDERSON AND GEOFF LARCOM

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporters

Fred Wenk rolled his eyes.

Wenk, the owner of Wenk's Pharmacy in Ann Arbor, had spent a difficult Tuesday morning trying to get through to various insurance companies as new Medicare drug benefits kicked in for many of his customers.

"We're kind of backed up here," Wenk said, as he and an associate hustled to fill orders behind the counter. "It's like three Mondays rolled into one."

New Year's Day may have marked the official start to the new Medicare drug benefit for senior citizens, known as Part D. But as the first business day following the long holiday weekend, Tuesday also was the first opportunity for many seniors to pick up prescriptions under the drug discount program.

It also proved a trying day for pharmacists, who have to manage a maze of new drug plans, insurance companies and overall patient confusion. Many patients were without the new insurance cards issued under the new Medicare plans, phone lines were often jammed, and overloaded computers crashed at some insurance companies.

"The online system was down, so whenever we tried to bill a claim, it said it was busy," said Carl Olson, a pharmacist with Dexter Pharmacy on Main Street. "It made it kind of rough."

But Olson, who said about a third of his customers are Medicare recipients, said the remainder of the day went smoothly.

Michigan's 1.5 million seniors are eligible to receive the drug benefit. The enrollment period will continue through May 15.

David Adams, a pharmacist at Kroger Pharmacy on Maple Road in Ann Arbor, displayed a whole notebook of new scenarios under the new Medicare plan, which could potentially double the pharmacy's workload, he said.

Adams said the fact that Kroger was open Monday, a holiday for some businesses, helped employees sort out some of the new variables of the plan. If the pharmacy couldn't link up with new insurers, it simply gave customers several days of medication while the pharmacy sorted things out, Adams said.

Many pharmacists said the day included long delays for customers and for pharmacists, who scrambled to contact insurance companies.

"Some of the new Medicare providers have had some problems with their drug files and co-pay files, and then we have to call their help desk," said Al Knaak, managing pharmacist at Village Pharmacy II on Maple Road in Ann Arbor. "There have been some glitches. But other parts have been fine. So it's kind of hit or miss."

Some customers agreed the new plans offer a baffling variety of decisions.

"There are so many insurances. I don't know which way to go," said Margaret Price as she left Wenk's Pharmacy on Tuesday.

Catherine Miller, a former Ann Arbor Public Schools employee, said she feels fortunate to be able to rely on the school system's insurance plan for prescription coverage, and not on Medicare. "I took the easy out," she said.

People needing to fill prescriptions were attended to - it just took longer if they didn't have their insurance cards, said Joe Mignano, a pharmacist at the Meijer pharmacy on Jackson Road in Scio Township.

Mignano said pharmacists sometimes had to engage in a "hunt-and-peck" process to get the necessary verification from carriers. "They seemed to be a little overwhelmed," he said of the insurance companies.

But the difficulties were not universal. Several pharmacists said Tuesday afternoon was far easier than the morning.

"We're doing very well with it," said Brady Murphy, managing pharmacist with Chelsea Pharmacy. "Most of (the seniors) are without their cards, but we've been able to look them up in the system."

The first of the year is typically a busy time for pharmacists, as most health insurance changes generally take effect Jan. 1.

At the start of the day, Bob Van Bemmelen, pharmacist/ manager of Miller Drug on Main Street in downtown Milan, expected to handle those claims. But by day's end, he had spent several hours on the phone dealing with Part D.

"We're solving stuff but it's been a battle," he said Tuesday afternoon. "I would say I was on the phone with insurance companies today probably about 30 percent of my time."

Nevertheless, he doesn't expect the problems to last long.

"It's like installing a new computer system," he said. "The first day is usually worst. It'll get better as the days and weeks go by."

Scott Anderson can be reached at sanderson@annarbornnews.com or at (734) 994-6843.

So far, so good for Medicare switch

Wednesday, January 04, 2006

By Nate Reens
The Grand Rapids Press

For 15 minutes, Mike Rose thought the predicted complications with new Medicare prescription drug plans would play out, causing confusion for pharmacists and their customers.

And then Rose, a pharmacist and co-owner of Parkwood Pharmacy on Burton Street SW in Wyoming, rebooted his computer.

Problem solved.

"It wasn't overwhelming, but we worked in advance with our customers to make sure it was as smooth as possible," Rose said, noting the pharmacy tried to get prescription refills in before the end of 2005 and ensure proper Medicare information was in the computer system. The new drug plans, government-approved but offered by private companies, took effect Sunday. Some anticipated chaos and long customer waits to have prescriptions filled.

That largely didn't materialize, although professionals still say the number of plans could bring headaches now that Medicare no longer is automatic and beneficiaries have to make coverage choices. Rose said the first days of the new year have held no hiccups, despite the fact that the first of any month routinely brings waves of customers. When the first business day of a month falls on a Monday, Rose calls it a "double whammy."

"Mondays and the first day of the month are our busiest," he said. "People remember over the weekend they need a refill. Others get (government) assistance and have gotten their checks. It usually makes for a busy day."

Rose hopes the Medicare switch continues with no difficulties, but knows that's not guaranteed.

"We'll see how it goes from here," he said.

A Rite-Aid pharmacist, who declined to be identified because company policy doesn't allow store workers to talk to the media, said the Medicare transition has gone smoothly.

The pharmacist said every new year brings challenges, with insurance providers switching coverages, customers using different health plans and changing industry regulations.

"It's typical," he said. "There are times it works beautifully and others when the information on the computers hasn't adjusted. It's not as bad as I thought it would be."

Pharmacists swamped as drug plan begins

Wednesday, January 04, 2006

schourey@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8575

Pharmacist Vicki Hodge and technician Joellyn Schipper, of Alexander's Allegan Community Pharmacy, took turns for 90 minutes holding the telephone to their ears until they got in touch with a Blue Cross and Blue Shield representative Tuesday.

They were trying to fill a single prescription.

Pharmacy workers across the area were frustrated by the requirements of a new prescription drug benefit, Medicare Plan D, which went into effect on the first day of the year and is considered to be the most significant change the program has seen.

Missing benefit cards were the biggest problem, workers said Tuesday.

For a variety of reasons, many people lacked the cards, literally the ticket to a smooth prescription transaction. Without them, pharmacy workers had to call as many as 50 different hotlines for individual insurance companies and plans to request the information needed to fill patients' prescriptions.

And that meant waiting on hold for about 30 minutes, asking customers to wait or do other shopping, trying to leave messages in corporate voicemail boxes that were full, and finally getting through to someone, only to be kicked off the system for no reason.

"It's made for a fun day," said Becky Hooley, technician at Medical Center Pharmacy of Three Rivers.

The story was the same across the area: Most people did not come with their drug cards, and that meant waits of 20-30 minutes for pharmacy workers and customers.

Pharmacy workers said customers were patient and understanding despite the waits. And in many cases, pharmacists such as Dan Alexander, who owns Alexander's Allegan Community Pharmacy, gave some customers medicine to hold them over for the few days it would take to properly fill their prescriptions.

"We feel obligated to do those types of things," Alexander said. "It's no fault of theirs that the system is overwhelmed by the responses."

Mark McClellan, commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration, told the Associated Press a late surge in enrollment made it difficult to process all applications before Jan. 1. However, by Tuesday afternoon, he said, computers were processing 10,000 eligibility queries an hour.

The plan, estimated to cost the government \$724 billion over the next 10 years, will help pay medicine costs for tens of millions of older Americans and the disabled.

"We had more than a million dual-eligibles in nursing homes getting their drugs on schedule with their prescriptions handled," McClellan said of the first days of the plan. "We've had hundreds of thousands of prescriptions filled for many thousands who had no coverage before."

Kelly Herriman, pharmacist at Hill's Pharmacy in Vicksburg, said 90 percent of the prescriptions she filled Tuesday were for people who did not have their cards.

Chris Rousch, a technician at Gull Pointe Pharmacy in Kalamazoo, said he has been unable since Sunday to get through to a single insurance company hotline to request his customers' eligibility information.

Ted Dornbos, a pharmacist at Hardings Market Place on Howard Street in Kalamazoo, said Tuesday afternoon that with each passing hour, another wave of pharmacies in time zones to the west would begin calling the already jammed 800 numbers to request patient information from insurance providers.

``The West Coast just opened up," Dornbos said. ``Things are going to get slower and slower."

At a pharmacy in Gobles, one employee who would not give her name was feeling the slowdown.

``Do you want to get a sense of what it's like? It's like this: I'm too busy to talk to you. I'm so far behind," she said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Part -D Medicare switch mostly smooth, pharmacists say

BY JEREMY MCBAIN NEWS-REVIEW STAFF WRITER

Tuesday, January 3, 2006 3:09 PM EST

The new prescription drug expansion of Medicare - called part D - began Sunday with a few bumps for seniors around the area.

On Monday, many area pharmacists said overall things were going smoothly with the program, but several problems were reported when it came to getting information for patients, because computers lines and companies running the various plans were still shut down for the New Year's holiday.

"Fortunately, this isn't a big day for us because of the holiday. Everything seems to be processing fine if we get all of the information in there. That is the key," said Jim Kelbel, owner of Kelbel Pharmacy in Harbor Springs.

Kelbel said the problem he was having was people coming in without all of their information and when he would try to contact the facilitator to get information on that patient, the facilitator is shut down for the day.

However, he said if he has the billing information he found he can type that in manually and get medications to customers.

Another problem, he said, is various types of coverage for patients have not all been loaded into the computer system.

Bob Kerskovitz, spokesperson for Medicare, said the department was aware of the problems. He said people should bring their plan cards with them to the pharmacists or a welcome letter from their plan contractor if they do not have the cards yet.

He added people should keep their receipts for their medications.

He invites anyone with questions to contact Medicare by calling (800) MEDICARE.

For the most part though, the pharmacists said they were working through problems. "All of the help desks are pretty busy at this point. A lot of online support is busy. It is kind of what we expected," said Bill Bice, pharmacist at East Jordan Family Pharmacy.

Bice said East Jordan Family Pharmacy tried to get as much information as possible set up on its computers before the expansion went into effect. Plus, he said he gave a couple of presentations to the community on the changes.

“It was a lot of work preparing for it,” he said.

John Ochs, owners of Central Drugs in Charlevoix, said he did not have many people in on Monday using the plan, but there were not many problems for those who did.

He said there were some problems with checking information because of swamped computer lines and some people that had not gotten their cards yet.

Alan Dowty, pharmacy manager at Rite-Aid in Charlevoix, also said he hadn't seen any major issues.

“So far, so good,” he said.

But, he anticipated issues arising as more people begin coming in to use their new plans.

Dowty added he was not having problems getting information for his customers.

Matt Krawczak, pharmacist at Kmart in Petoskey, said the plans seemed to be working out well for his customers.

“Things have been pretty smooth for us today (Monday),” he said. “But we don't want to jinx it.”

He added he had not run into many real problems, but also said he had not seen a lot of people using the new plans yet.

“Social Security checks come out this week, so we are expecting more people in the middle of the week,” he said.

Krawczak said many people using the plans were already noticing savings.

“One customer saved 50 percent on her medications. She was surprised,” he said. “Most are so far pretty pleased.”

But Bob Huff, owner of Huff's Pharmacy in Boyne City, said the expansion was not working out well at all Monday. And he did not have high hopes for the new deal.

“I think a lot of people are going to get ripped,” he said.

Huff said a lot of his customers did not have their cards yet and he could not get information because the companies supplying the plans were closed Monday.

Additionally, he said he has had a lot of customers who are paying more than what they are used to paying for their medications under these new plans.

“The only people who are going to make money on this are the insurance companies,” he said.

“This system is going to hurt more than benefit by far. I believe by the end of the year the whole

thing will probably blow up.”

And he anticipates many problems with people getting their medication.

“It’s going to be a rotten month, probably, for a lot of people,” he said.

Jeremy McBain can be contacted at 439-9316, or jmcbain@petoskeynews.com.

Educational sessions set on Medicare Rx benefit

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

HOLLY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, January 04, 2006

By Shantell M. Kirkendoll
skirkendoll@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6366

More help is available for enrolling in Medicare's prescription drug benefit package. The last day to sign up for coverage in 2006 is May 15.

The Village of Holly Woodlands, 3323 Grange Hall Road, is hosting an educational session for seniors at 12:45 p.m. Jan. 16 in its circle community center building. To register, call Melissa Butler, at (248) 634-0592.

Volunteers with the Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program will continue to host sessions this month from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Thursday at Owosso Senior Center, (989)723-8875; Jan. 18 at Davison Richfield Senior Center, (810) 658-1566; and Jan. 25 at Lapeer Senior Center, (810) 245-5866.

It's the first time seniors enrolled in Medicare are eligible for prescription coverage. Monthly premiums are required and sometimes deductibles. Help is available for low-income seniors to pay their premiums.

The Medicare mess

Jackson Citizen Patriot Editorial

Wednesday, January 04, 2006

When Congress passed the Medicare prescription-drug benefit, we opposed it. It seemed to us that if the government couldn't afford existing entitlement programs, why start a new one? But the program (Medicare Part D) was launched, and enrollment started on Nov. 15. Eligible beneficiaries (all who are eligible for Medicare) must sign up for one of many participating plans by May 15 or pay higher premiums.

So go ahead and fish for information on how to sign up at the government's master Web site: www.medicare.gov. If you're among the 35 percent of the senior population who are comfortable using the Internet, you'll find some information readily obtainable.

For example, within a few minutes we were able to get a list of 78 plans that provide three drugs we listed (Lisinopril, Actonel, Triamterene). However, we could find no information on rates or premiums for the plans. So we called the Medicare 24-hour hotline -- 1-800-633-4227. After waiting about 5 minutes for a live agent, we were given sharply differing rates for two providers -- Aetna (\$37.83 monthly) and Humana (\$12.30) and directed to a place on the Web site where comparative rates are said to be available. But despite coaching by the hotline staffer, our computer froze up after laboring through multiple page changes.

Actually, rates for Michigan's 40 stand-alone Medicare prescription-drug benefit plans are included in the 2006 Medicare and You Handbook, mailed out to beneficiaries in October by the Social Security Administration. However, those familiar with it say it is not much help.

We work daily with people, computers and the Internet. We're accustomed to frustration in getting information we seek. If this was daunting to us, how must it strike a 75-year-old fighting the onset of declining faculties?

On the local level, the county's Department on Aging is trying to help out with volunteer counselors. Call 768-8655, wait for a return call within two days, and then schedule a personal consultation.

It's small wonder that of about 12 million Medicare recipients with little or no drug coverage, only 1 million have signed up for this benefit. Yet the Department of Health and Human Services hopes to sign up 28-30 million people -- the goal for this first year. That is a tall order.

We hope that our pessimism is eventually repudiated by evidence that millions of needy souls are signing up and getting drugs at a cost that makes the exercise worthwhile. We're not holding our breath, though.

If this sort of complex sign-up-or-suffer approach is going to be typical of future dealings with the senior populace, we have a suggestion for the federal officials who put this complex plan together:

Either get in touch with the retiree within, or call your own elderly parents. This is not how to design an entitlement program.

Published January 4, 2006

Elder care: Background checks fine, but key issue is financial

A Lansing State Journal editorial

No one is going to argue against efforts to ensure the people who care for our elderly are upstanding citizens.

But, as Michigan lawmakers address themselves to that issue - and an approaching deadline for federal funds - they must ask: Who's going to pay later?

Background checks for elder-care workers are supposed to be a top Capitol priority, reports the Booth Newspapers this week. Attorney General Mike Cox has been pushing hard for increased checks. And, Booth reports, the state must have a plan in place by March to qualify for \$5 million in federal dollars.

All well and good. But then what?

Background checks cost money. The more you do, or the more deeply you search, the more money is spent. That \$5 million from Washington will help. But money from Capitol Hill is never a guarantee. What's a top issue in one year, with one Congress, can become the target of budget cutters the next.

And the Granholm administration, another advocate for increased background checks, already has been arguing with Washington to save federal funds for other social programs.

If Michigan wants to expand upon the good, solid citizens already working in elder care, the state has to address two issues:

- How will the state pay for these checks if federal funds prove insufficient?
- What effect will this program have on the size and cost of the elder-care work force?

It's one of our society's unpleasant secrets that we entrust our elders to an industry that doesn't pay well. Six months ago, Granholm accepted the report of a long-term care study panel that noted: "The package of wages, health care coverage, paid time off, and other benefits offered (long-term-care) employees are rarely competitive."

Michigan can create all the background check legislation it wants. But lawmakers haven't done their jobs until they secure funds to run the checks - and help broaden the opportunities for those working in the industry.

Judge hands out jail time for thefts from elderly woman

Wednesday, January 04, 2006

lturner@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8564

Minnette Winkel, 78, owned thousands of dollars worth of antiques and high-quality furniture collected during her lifetime.

Selling them in her later years likely would have brought a tidy profit to let her live out her days in relative comfort.

But she was buried in a cardboard box.

Her belongings were taken and sold by two women who were supposed to have been Winkel's caregivers.

On Tuesday, Brenda Rodrigues-Ostland, 41, of Shaver Road, one of the two women convicted of larceny in a building in connection with the theft of Winkel's property, apologized to the court for her actions, saying she was ``really, really, really sorry."

That didn't cut it with Kalamazoo County Circuit Judge Philip D. Schaefer, who had presided over her October trial. He subjected her to a thorough tongue-lashing before sentencing her.

``You have to know you were picking on someone who couldn't defend herself," Schaefer told Rodrigues-Ostland. ``You saw her as a victim and you sucked the life out of her.

``Shame on you."

Winkel had worked with Gloria Swinsick of the Kalamazoo County Prosecutor's Office Victim Assistance Program after Rodrigues-Ostland and Georgia Marie Vrabel were each charged with larceny in a building in connection with the thefts, which occurred in August 2003 in Kalamazoo.

Vrabel, 43, of East Michigan Avenue, and Rodrigues-Ostland's sister, pleaded guilty to the charge and was sentenced Nov. 1, 2004, to five years of probation, victim restitution to be determined, entry into the Kalamazoo Probation Enhancement Program and ordered to have no contact with Winkel.

Winkel, who used a wheelchair, told Swinsick she had 10 pewter figurines, each worth \$1,000, five china cabinets worth an estimated \$5,000 each, a \$2,500 diamond ring, a \$6,000 black opal brooch, \$4,000 wine decanters, books worth more than \$1,000 and many other items that were taken from her while she was hospitalized for a medical condition. Her microwave had been taken as well as a television cable box. A chandelier had been removed from the ceiling.

When Winkel died penniless and with no known kin last March 12, Swinsick spent 12 days helping to locate a family burial plot in Lawrence. She also helped to secure burial services, the cost of which were written off by Langeland Family Funeral Homes and the cemetery because the state of Michigan pays only a fraction of the cost.

Winkel's body was laid to rest in a cardboard box, said Swinsick, who served as one of the pallbearers carrying it on ropes to the grave site where a quick service was held. Winkel's husband's ashes were buried with her.

“If Minnette was here, she would probably just ask for her things to be returned,” Swinsick told the court before sentencing. “She wanted to know why this happened. She wasn’t vindictive at all.”

The behavior shown by Rodrigues-Ostland crossed a line with Schaefer.

“I have no forgiveness for you in my heart and I doubt anyone else in this community does either,” he said.

Rodrigues-Ostland was in tears by the time Schaefer sentenced her to five years of probation, victim restitution of at least \$4,350.40 for burial expenses, 300 hours of community service work and nine months in jail with credit for three days served.

“May God have mercy on your soul because I certainly do not,” Schaefer said.

LSJ
IB
1/4/06

IN BRIEF

Police warn of bank account scam

Police have received more than a dozen calls since Monday from people who say they were targets of a fraud scheme.

Either a man or woman has been calling seniors — most from Ingham County — and trying to trick them into giving out their bank account information.

The scheme works like this: A person, who claims to be from the bank, calls and says there are problems with the victim's account and they need to create a new account number. Then they ask for the victim's old account number, saying they need it to make the change.

"Banks never call and ask for account numbers over the phone," Lt. Bruce Ferguson said.

He didn't know of anyone who had lost money, so far.

Police started fielding calls from concerned residents late Monday afternoon.

"We received about a dozen calls within the first hour and a half," he said.

Anyone who believes they have been a victim of this scheme is urged to call 483-4600.

LSJ
1/4/06
1B

Elder abuse task force to meet

The Governor's Task Force on Elder Abuse will meet from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday at East Lansing's Hannah Community Center.

The meeting, convened by the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging, will cover issues of prosecuting elder abuse cases, law enforcement training, investigating financial exploitation, and sentencing guidelines.

Speakers include representatives from the Wayne County Prosecutors Office Elder Abuse Unit, Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards, Michigan State Police, Michigan Prosecuting Attorney's Association, and the Michigan Prosecuting Attorneys' Coordinating Council.

The meeting is open to the public. It will be in the first floor banquet room of the center, 819 Abbot Road.

TROY

Helpers sought to clear seniors' walks

Troy is looking for volunteers to help low-income senior citizens clear their walkways during the winter. According to Carrie Lamm of the Parks and Recreation department, the city requires that sidewalks must be shoveled within 24 hours of a snowfall. Residents can adopt a senior for the remainder of the winter by calling the Troy Community Center at (248) 524-3484. Callers will be matched with a senior not more than a mile away from the volunteer's residence or place of business.

Father Accused Of Sexually Assaulting Toddler

Incident Allegedly Occurred During Visitation

POSTED: 1:24 pm EST January 3, 2006

A 28-year-old Shelby Township man is accused of sexually assaulting his 2-year-old daughter. Michael Henry Hadrian (pictured, right) was arraigned on charges in connection with the alleged assault, which occurred on Dec. 26 at the Fox Lane apartment complex on West Utica Road, west of Mound Road, according to Shelby Township police.

Hadrian and the girl's mother are divorced, and the daughter was visiting her father when the alleged assault occurred, according to police.

The girl was physically doing well, police said.

Hadrian has no criminal past, according to police. His bond was set at \$1,000,000. A preliminary examination date was not yet scheduled.

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Child's Accused Killer Trial Underway

Peter Ross

Port Huron Times Herald

Created: 1/3/2006 5:09:53 PM

Updated: 1/3/2006 5:23:56 PM

Grand Rapids - A jury was seated Tuesday in the felony murder trial of a man accused of killing a two year-old boy last August. The trial against Leeclifton Moore before Judge Dennis Kolenda is expected to last just over one week. Opening arguments start Wednesday morning.

Prosecutors allege Moore caused injuries resulting in the death of Armon Colar. Moore - a boyfriend of Colar's mother - was caring for the child and his two siblings in their Northeast Grand Rapids apartment in late August when the boy lost consciousness. He died the next day at the hospital.

Moore's attorney - and family - say the boy suffered abusive injuries before Moore entered his mother's life. They plan to emphasize that area of reasonable doubt.

If convicted, Moore will be sentenced to life in prison.

Web Editor: Peter Ross, Senior Reporter

Slaying trial to start

Wednesday, January 04, 2006

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Attorneys were expected to give opening statements today in the trial of a man accused in the August death of a 2-year-old boy. LeeClifton Moore, 18, is charged with felony murder in Armon Colar's death. Moore was living with the boy's mother, Alicia Colar. On Aug. 24, he was watching the toddler and two older sisters while their mother was visiting family nearby. The victim suffered multiple injuries, including blunt-force trauma that caused brain swelling and bleeding.

Acquitted janitor to return

Wednesday, January 04, 2006

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A former Palmer Elementary School janitor acquitted of charges he molested a sixth-grade girl is returning to work in the Grand Rapids Public Schools. Charles VanBennekom, 56, worked in the district for nearly 30 years, but was suspended without pay since March 2004, pending the case's resolution. A Kent County Circuit Court jury last month cleared him of four counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct. VanBennekom will return to a position in the district and receive \$80,000 in back pay.

January 3, 2006

Governor Granholm Signs Legislation to Strengthen Penalties for Torture

LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today signed legislation that will, for the first time, make torture a criminal act in Michigan and provide penalties of up to life imprisonment for persons convicted under the new statute. The laws become effective on March 1, 2006.

"The torture of a fellow human being is one of the most heinous crimes a person can commit," said Granholm. "I am proud to sign legislation that will provide prosecutors with the tools they need to ensure that anyone who would commit this type of reprehensible act is punished appropriately."

The two bills signed by Granholm define torture as intent to cause cruel or extreme physical or mental pain and suffering. Torture is now a Class A felony punishable by a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. The Governor applauded the efforts of Representative John Espinoza (D-Croswell) who first introduced anti-torture legislation last July after learning that Huron County prosecutors were frustrated that a man accused of torturing his blind, diabetic wife could not be held accountable for the unspeakable acts of torture he committed, because no such law existed in Michigan.

"Victims of people who torture will now have the weapons they need to get justice, and those who torture others will now be held accountable for their crimes," said Espinoza.

"I applaud the Governor for giving Michigan and our citizens an important law enforcement tool to help protect our families and loved ones and to make our communities safer."

House Bill 5268 (PA 335 of 2005) was sponsored by Representative Tom Meyer (R-Bad Axe), and House Bill 5269 (PA 336 of 2005) was sponsored by Representative Mike Nofs (R-Battle Creek).

Nofs-sponsored bill now law

The Battle Creek Enquirer

State Rep. Mike Nofs, R-Battle Creek, sponsored the sentencing guidelines bill of the two bills signed Tuesday by Gov. Jennifer Granholm making torture a criminal act in Michigan and providing penalties of up to life imprisonment.

Nofs said he was motivated by a report of a Huron County man torturing his wife and the county prosecutor's inability to pursue charges.

"I thought we needed a law with some stiff sentencing guidelines," he said. "It gives prosecutors another tool to prosecute someone who is doing something despicable to another person, and I'm real happy the governor signed it."

The new legislation defines torture as intent to cause cruel or extreme physical or mental pain and suffering, according to a press release issued by the governor's office. Torture is now a Class A felony punishable by a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

"The torture of a fellow human being is one of the most heinous crimes a person can commit," Granholm said in the release. "I am proud to sign legislation that will provide prosecutors with the tools they need to ensure that anyone who would commit this type of reprehensible act is punished appropriately."

According to the governor's press release, Rep. John Espinoza, D-Croswell, first introduced anti-torture legislation last July after learning of a reported case of a Huron County man torturing his blind, diabetic wife. County prosecutors were frustrated the man could not be held accountable for torture because no such law existed in Michigan.

Rep. Tom Meyer, R-Bad Axe, sponsored the other bill signed Tuesday by Granholm.

The laws become effective March 1.

Originally published January 4, 2006

Oakland County

LOOKING FOR HOME: Pontiac says no thanks to grant for homeless

City says it has enough shelters, rejects \$1 million

January 4, 2006

BY BILL LAITNER
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Until he came to live with her this year, Kathi Pemberton's brother was homeless for three years on the streets of Pontiac.

So Pemberton, 41, of Waterford said she was shocked when she heard that Pontiac officials had rejected a \$1-million state grant to provide housing for the homeless.

"What I don't understand about the Pontiac City Council is, they say they don't want homeless people wandering the streets. Well, if they had housing for them, they wouldn't be out there," Pemberton said Tuesday.

The rejection of the grant shocked state officials and advocates for the homeless. They said the grants were welcomed by seven other cities around Michigan -- Battle Creek, Benton Harbor, Detroit, Flint, Lansing, Muskegon and Saginaw.

The Pontiac City Council voted in December to reject the grant, and both its outgoing mayor, Willie Payne, and its new mayor, Clarence Phillips, -- sworn in Sunday -- said last week they felt Pontiac should not accept additional facilities for homeless people. Phillips said he would "listen carefully" to the latest proposal but said he doubted that he would accept a new facility.

"If you look at the halfway houses we have, the shelters we have, and look at a map of that in color, it looks like Pontiac has the measles," Phillips said.

"We don't mind taking care of our own, but not the whole state of Michigan," he said. Although homeless advocates declined to estimate the size of Pontiac's homeless population, they said that Pontiac and Royal Oak shelter most of the homeless people in Oakland County, while so-called transitional housing -- including halfway houses and subsidized housing -- is scattered through many communities.

But this week, leaders of several nonprofit groups in Oakland County said they still believe they can persuade Pontiac officials to accept the grant, which instead of providing traditional shelter for the homeless would create permanent housing tied to support services -- from drug treatment to job training -- designed to keep people off the streets.

Nonprofit leaders hope to sit down with Pontiac officials next week, said Kathy Williams, a volunteer with the Oakland County Task Force on Homelessness and Affordable Housing.

Pontiac officials have long been averse to having homeless people and shelters in their downtown. But Williams said Tuesday that the new facilities would not have to be in the downtown, and that state officials are telling her they could even be in a neighboring community. The state continues to require, however, that the location at least be near Pontiac because of its high number of homeless people, she said.

In Pontiac itself, the rejection was widely supported, said the Rev. Kent Clark, head of the city's largest shelter, the nonprofit Grace Centers of Hope.

"There's quite an uproar here" about having more homeless people in the city; "there's so much confusion about how to get them back into the mainstream," said Clark. His shelter programs accept no government funding.

"On the positive side, I think good things could happen with a grant like that if you had a whole lot of training involved -- people paying part of their way, learning how to keep up their houses," Clark said Tuesday.

The tiff between state housing officials and Pontiac began in November, when the Michigan State Housing Development Authority announced a record \$10 million in combined state-and-federal grants would be paid to eight cities. The goal is to replicate the success that New York and Philadelphia have had in providing permanent housing for the homeless, tied to programs that stabilize their lives, said Sally Harrison at the state Housing Development Authority.

In those cities, the permanent housing is "reducing other costs -- for emergency services, for ambulances, for jails. The studies show that doing this is actually less expensive than just sheltering people" in the long term, said Harrison, interim director of the authority's Office of Supportive Housing and Homeless Initiatives.

In 2002, Pontiac was ranked "4th meanest city in the nation" on a scale of compassion for the homeless created by the nonprofit National Coalition for the Homeless in Washington, D.C.

That infuriated Pontiac's leaders, said the group's executive director, Michael Stoops.

Pontiac got the rating for its relentless push to get homeless people out of its downtown, including the police department's demand in 2002 to see the names of homeless people staying at the city's largest shelter, leading to arrests of those who had outstanding warrants, Stoops said.

As of this month, Michigan has an estimated 26,000 homeless people -- 5th highest level in the country, he said.

One fewer on the streets is Pemberton's brother Greg King. She's proud that he has been free of alcohol for more than 100 days.

"He wouldn't be living with me if he weren't. He'd be back out there in Pontiac," she said.

Contact BILL LAITNER at 248-351-3297.

Helping the homeless

By Catherine Kavanaugh

Royal Oak Daily Tribune Staff Writer

PUBLISHED: January 2, 2006

Families volunteer at Royal Oak warming center

ROYAL OAK — Joelle Kenney flew in from Portland for the holidays to spend time with her mother and 50 strangers at the Welcome Inn.

The 28-year-old likes to travel and climbed Mount Fuji last summer.

This time she wanted a working vacation.

Her mother, Maidie, who lives in Royal Oak, suggested they volunteer at the shelter run by South Oakland Citizens for the Homeless.

The Kenneys serve food, wash dishes and play hours of dominoes, ping pong and pool with people down on their luck or dealing with substance abuse and mental illness. And, they are enjoying every minute of it.

"It's important to keep a progressive mind-set and remember we are part of a community that needs to help each other out," Joelle Kenney said. "Life is about learning from each other, even if it's domino strategies."

The Kenneys are among a growing number of families adopting the Welcome Inn — the only daytime shelter in Oakland County — as it faces the financial challenge of opening a month early this year without a budget increase.

The couples and families who volunteer at Unity Church, 2500 Crooks, where the program will operate into March, help put the welcome in Welcome Inn, according to Melissa Herron of Ferndale, a co-director with Roy Watson of Royal Oak and Jodi Zabawski of Roseville.

"The families are great. They don't just stand there," Herron said. "They talk to people and interact with them. The guests really enjoy it, especially talking with the younger kids."

Trish Marback of Rochester Hills and her two sons, 13 and 15, have been pitching in with time and food. Marback served up a hot and hearty lunch of black-eyed pea soup, corn bread, vegetables and salad recently.

Hot meals are in short supply and big demand at the Welcome Inn, where cold cuts don't always cut it with guests who had been walking snowy streets in tennis shoes until the doors opened Dec. 19.

"Trish bought all the ingredients and then made all the food herself," Herron said. "Everyone really appreciated it."

Cathy Nelson of Royal Oak also has filled crock pots with steaming stews for guests dodging the cold until the church warming centers open at 9 p.m.

Tom and Jane Foster of Clawson volunteer with their daughter, Erin, from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays. They keep the snack and beverage table

stocked, work on Sudoku puzzles and talk about the day's headlines with the guests.

The Fosters said helping at the Welcome Inn serves as a constant reminder of how many people live on the brink of homelessness and then find themselves on the streets because of job layoffs, divorce, addiction and the ailing Michigan economy.

"It's mind boggling that so many are just a blink away from this situation," Jane Foster said.

It's also rewarding to be part of the safety net that provides a warm place to stay and a small staff to work on health and employment issues, according to the Fosters.

"I don't like getting up to go to work when it's 6 or 7 degrees. I can't imagine fending off the cold all day," said Tom Foster, who works for General Motors. "My time here gives me perspective. It's as good for us as it is for them."

Maidie Kenney agrees.

"Every city has people invisible to most residents, but I know they are here and I want to do something," she said.

The volunteers and staff at the Welcome Inn do make a difference in the lives of their guests. John Clark of Chippewa Falls, Wis., can vouch for that. He was on his way home from Florida when his car hit the 115,000-mile mark and broke down. He scrapped it along with hopes of getting home for the holidays.

It took a few days but Herron obtained a free Greyhound bus ticket for Clark, who had nowhere else to turn and was eager to get back to his restaurant job and earn some more paychecks.

"Without this place, I'd be in a whole world of hurt. There are beautiful people here," Clark said.

Contact Catherine Kavanaugh at cathy.kavanaugh@dailytribune.com or 248-591-2504.

Find balance in welfare rules

The Saginaw News

Wednesday, January 04, 2006

Politics shouldn't get in the way of Republican lawmakers and Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm finding a compromise on new state welfare rules. Both sides agree the goal is to get recipients back to work. Granholm and legislative Democrats also agree with Republicans on a 48-month limit on welfare benefits for adults.

Since 2006 is an election year, however, politics is likely the biggest obstacle to rewriting the state's 10-year-old welfare rules.

The Democratic governor vetoed the GOP-controlled Legislature's plan last week. That forced lawmakers to extend the existing rules in an unusual year-end session.

Granholm said she primarily aimed her veto at preserving the safety net for children. Any benefit cutoff, she said, needed an exception for families living up to the state's rules but still struggling with chronic illness or child-care obstacles.

"I simply will not sign a bill that will have the effect of forcing families with children into utter economic desperation or homelessness," Granholm said.

Republicans countered that the new rules allowed for a fifth year extension in special circumstances.

The state does need flexibility in special cases, and most welfare recipients are happy to find a job and get off state assistance. Some, however, do need the incentive of an end to benefits to prod them back to work or into retraining. There's nothing wrong with a benefit limit in those cases.

Mostly Democratic cries of doom and gloom and of people starving on the streets failed to materialize after a Republican Congress and President Bill Clinton, a Democrat, enacted federal welfare reform in 1992. And nearly everyone called the current state rules, enacted under Republican Gov. John Engler, tough at the time. The cries of coming poverty and homeless didn't materialize then either.

Welfare recipients aren't living lavishly. Most can barely scrape by on welfare; most would welcome work.

With the economy sitting in a prolonged slump, Michigan must preserve a social safety net that provides for children and adults who follow the rules and are trying to get off state assistance. Flexibility shouldn't have to come at the cost of accountability -- and vice versa. Partisans should keep both in mind as they seek a solution.

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January is Stalking Awareness Month

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has proclaimed January Stalking Awareness Month in Michigan.

"Stalking Awareness Month emphasizes the serious consequences of this criminal activity," Granholm said in a statement.

"We should all do what we can to provide support to stalking victims, and to collaborate to promote safety in our homes, neighborhoods and workplaces."

Under Michigan law, stalking is "a willful course of conduct involving repeated or continuing harassment of another individual that would cause a reasonable person to feel terrorized, frightened, intimidated, threatened, harassed or molested."

Michigan has had a law against stalking since 1993.

— *From staff and wire reports*

University's profile rose during Murray's tenure

Wednesday, January 04, 2006

By Ed White
The Grand Rapids Press

ALLENDALE -- Mark Murray anticipated "coming up for air" and contemplating his future after a few more years as president of Grand Valley State University.

That timetable has been eliminated.

After nearly five years, Murray said he is leaving GVSU because the presidency of Meijer Inc. is an opportunity that cannot be ignored.

"I thrive on challenges. ... Doors like this don't open very often," said Murray, 51, who was state treasurer and budget director under Gov. John Engler before moving to GVSU in 2001.

He will depart a university that is larger, more selective and more racially diverse than when he arrived. GVSU no longer is a purely regional school: a quarter of its 22,565 students come from the east side of the state. Three national football championships since 2002 have helped raise its profile.

Trustees said Murray has been exceptional in knowing state politics and the realities of the budget process in Lansing when tax revenue is weak and universities are scrambling for every dollar.

"We don't compete against each other but, in a sense, we do. There's only one pot of money," said Jessie Dalman, chairwoman of GVSU's governing board and a former state lawmaker.

"He knows the overall budget, not just the higher-education piece. We'll miss that," she said.

State aid for campus operations is \$61.1 million this year, up 9 percent compared to 2003-04, when GVSU's share fell to \$56.1 million during budget cuts.

Another trustee, Muskegon-area banker Jose Infante, said Murray "was a great find for us."

I was caught by surprise, but five years for a university president is what we should expect.

Thirty-two years is not the norm," Infante said, referring to Murray's predecessor, Arend "Don" Lubbers.

"We've gone from being a commuter school to where more and more students live on campus.

Mark has had a strong desire to show parents that where they send their kids there's a quality of life," Infante said. "I'm in Florida right now. I'm shocked that people here know what Grand Valley is."

When he shared news of the job switch with trustees, some asked, "Is there anything we can do?"

-- a suggestion that perhaps he would change his mind if GVSU offered a raise or other incentives. He is paid \$187,932 a year, plus use of a home in East Grand Rapids and other perks.

"No," Murray said. "I don't believe in a bake-off."

Dalman said GVSU would not be able to overcome Meijer's deep pockets. Besides, she added, "would you want to keep someone who wants a bigger challenge?"

Murray is leaving some money on the table. Under his employment agreement with GVSU, he would have received a \$175,000 bonus if he stayed through June 2008. His salary at Meijer, a privately owned company, was not disclosed.

Dalman said it is too soon to know when a successor will be picked, though Murray said he is willing to stay through the academic year. Trustees could meet as early as next week to discuss a search.

Murray was an unconventional candidate when he applied for GVSU's presidency: a career in state government, no doctorate degree, not much experience in higher education.

Dalman anticipates applicants with similar backgrounds, though she also expects to hear from people with many academic credentials.

"It would be helpful if we could find someone in Michigan," she said.

Murray said he has succeeded in stabilizing GVSU's growth. While there are about 2,000 more students now than in 2001, it is tougher to get a seat on campus. Grade-point averages and college-test scores for incoming freshmen are higher than in 2000.

He said he wants to be remembered as "having led a university that is completely passionate about serving its students."

Local charities see mixed results on fundraising efforts

Salvation Army only one to meet goal

By Chad Dally
Hillsdale Daily News

While one local charitable organization was successful in reaching its fundraising goal over the holidays, other groups in the area said lately the funds are getting tougher to secure.

The Hillsdale chapter of the Salvation Army was able to raise \$95,000 through its "Tree of Lights" campaign, which began in mid-November. The funding is directed toward the group's overall budget, and is used for utility, rental and prescription assistance, food and other needs of the public.

Salvation Army spokesman Major Elmer Trapp said that while not all of the money is in their hands yet, he is confident they have met their goal.

"We've had a lot of resources that helped bring in donations, such as the paper kettles some stores kept for us, our bell ringing and appeals through the mail," he said. "This community really supports the Salvation Army, and we just try to keep a positive attitude that the money is out there."

But it seems that the money is not out there for every organization.

Karen Randall, executive director of the American Red Cross in Jackson, said that because of an unusually high number of fires across the area displacing families, and the need for extensive help due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the agency could spend almost double its typical budget on food, clothing and shelter.

"There's been such a need for our services that we've gone back to community organizations and individuals for help with some of our local disaster relief," Randall said.

One of the unexpected consequences of generous support for hurricane relief is that local charitable organizations find donations a little harder to secure because so many people have donated money already.

"While we appreciate the wonderful outpouring of support at the national level, we just like to remind people that our communities need help as well," Randall said.

Pia Seebach-York, executive director of the United Way of Hillsdale County, agreed that funding is harder to come by these days. The United Way recently wrapped up its fall campaign, and although the group was able to raise \$130,000, it is less than they raised last year.

"The hurricanes have definitely played a role, as well as the economy in general," she said.

"Plus, we're seeing more and more non-profits that are competing for national and local dollars."

But Randall added that budget issues should not deter people from calling when they need help from the Red Cross. Anyone in need of shelter, food or clothing over the holiday weekend can still call their office and the Red Cross will respond within two hours.

"Our services will be covered, whether the funds are there or not, we just hate to see our relief funds get so low," Randall said.

Chances are someone you know needs food Donations aren't keeping pace with need

Ann Arbor News Editorial

Saturday, January 2, 2006

Many of us packed on a few extra pounds over the holidays and now are keeping our New Year's resolutions to cut back on what we eat.

Not everyone is cutting back by choice.

We all have neighbors - perhaps even colleagues - who struggle each day to feed their families.

"With the holidays and the way things have been with the economy, it's hard not just for people without jobs, it's hard for people with jobs, too," Towana Aldridge, a 24-year-old Ypsilanti resident with two kids, recently told The News.

Aldridge was getting help from a food bank run by the Christian Law Enforcement Fellowship at the Michigan State Police post in Ypsilanti Township. The group is one of several local nonprofits providing much-needed aid to families and individuals.

It's a tough time for all nonprofits, food banks included. Donations are down, in some cases significantly. Donations that in the past flowed to these groups have been diverted to extreme emergencies like last year's hurricanes.

At the same time, need is greater than ever. We all know someone who has lost their job, or who faces increased costs - most notably in heating bills this winter - without a parallel increase in income.

And no, it's not just the homeless who need food. That's one of many myths the Food Bank Council of Michigan tries to debunk on its Web site at www.fbcmich.org. An increasing number of working poor families are tapping charitable groups for food, too. And according to the council, 50 percent of people who get help from emergency food providers are children and seniors.

Here's an even more striking number: Each year, one in 13 people statewide uses a food bank.

That means all of us, if we don't need help ourselves, know someone who does.

So how can you help?

Food Gatherers, a local nonprofit that's been a strong advocate for food relief since it was founded 17 years ago, has some ideas:

Donate food or money directly to food banks in your community.

Hold your own food drive at your work, school, place of worship or neighborhood.

Request food donations instead of gifts for your next birthday.

Volunteer your time at one of the local spots - the Delonis Center in Ann Arbor, the Salvation Army in Ypsilanti and numerous churches - that serve hot meals throughout the year.

Think of the food in your own refrigerator, cabinets or pantry. Think about how much you have. And remember those who aren't so fortunate.

Salvation Army campaign falls short

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, January 04, 2006

By George Jaksa

gjaksa@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6332

FLINT - Salvation Army officials hope there's enough Christmas spirit left in the area to lift the Genesee County unit closer to its 2005 goal of raising \$600,000.

Mail and individual gifts are needed to offset a 9 percent drop in red kettle donations for the season. Connie Peters, development director, said kettles at more than 40 sites brought in \$301,162, compared with \$329,301 in 2004. The kettle drive ended Christmas Eve.

So far, the mail appeal has totaled \$264,555, 8 percent more than last year's total of \$244,131, Peters said. Final totals will be reported to the Army's Advisory Board on Jan. 19.

"I am really excited we made all that we did, especially with all that is going on in the Flint area," Peters said.

In addition to the area's economy and donations to hurricane relief efforts, Peters said higher living costs are forcing people to budget more carefully.

"People are watching their dollars," Peters said. "Every penny counts for them."

To date, the campaign has reached 94 percent of its goal, which was set after the Salvation Army raised \$638,024 in 2004, easily eclipsing its \$550,000 target.

Earlier, Capt. John Williams, commander of the Salvation Army for Genesee County, said about 1,500 families received Christmas gifts in a two-day distribution just before Christmas. Williams said 1,300 families received gifts the previous year.

He said part of the increase came from the agency distributing gifts ordinarily provided by Toys for Tots, the U.S. Marine Corps effort that did not make its own distribution this year because the local director was ill.

The Salvation Army's Christmas campaign helps provide services year-round for the agency.

QUICK TAKE

Christmas campaign KETTLE INCOME:

\$301,162, down 9 percent

MAIL APPEAL:

\$264,555, up 8 percent

RESULTS: About

6 percent short of overall goal of \$600,000

TO DONATE:

Money still being accepted; call (810)

232-2196

Posted: 1-4-2006

Strong kettle campaign gives The Salvation Army Ludington Corps hope Fate may depend on success of its store over the next two months

By JENNA KLOECKNER
Ludington Daily News Staff Writer

The future of The Salvation Army Ludington Corps is still hanging in the balance, but a successful Red Kettle Campaign over the Christmas season is giving the local corps hope.

A review at the end of the month will influence whether the Ludington Corps will maintain its 110-year presence in Mason County or be recommended for closure by The Salvation District Headquarters in Grand Rapids. A final decision on closing is expected in March.

Ludington Corps Major Jon Welch said the 2005 Red Kettle (bellringing) Campaign that ended Dec. 24 far exceeded the corps' expectations. It brought in over \$29,000, more than twice as much as the campaign in 2004, which brought in roughly \$13,000. He said the number of Red Kettle volunteers was up this Christmas, too, by about 70 percent.

"We went beyond what we were expecting," Welch said. "It shows that people want to show their support for The Salvation Army, and want to keep us here in Mason County." Over the Christmas season, The Salvation Army helped 402 families in Mason County, passing out about 7,300 toys and stocking stuffers, and providing over 600 children with items such as toys and mittens.

"It was a good season," Welch said. "(There were) lots of people helping out, lots of people donating."

Welch said he is hoping the successful Christmas season — financially and otherwise — will fare well at the January review, and sway the district headquarters' decision in March in the local corps' favor.

Another positive for the local corps, he said, is the addition of advisory board members. The district headquarters would like the local corps to have 15 members by March of this year. It currently has six.

Other concerns are looming.

Namely, The Salvation Army Family Store. The local corps leased the store, located in a strip mall on Ludington Avenue east of Nelson road, in 2005 in response to residents' requests to reopen a thrift store. The Corps had closed and then sold the thrift store it once ran on South James Street when it determined it was giving away more clothes and goods than selling.

Welch said the new store hasn't been doing as well as was hoped, and that is part of the reason the district headquarters is concerned about the local corps.

He said the store had good months in October and November — they were in the black — but December was a little slow. He said the inclement weather may have had something to do with that, and also, the fact that business is generally slower in the winter months for many area businesses.

Deb Wright, chair of The Salvation Army Ludington Corps advisory board, said January and February are critical months for the store.

She is concerned, yet hopeful.

“We have until March to show (the store) can make a profit and that’s going to be tough in the two slowest (business) months of the year,” she said. “But I’m hopeful. I believe we’ll succeed because the other choice is too unpleasant.

“We need a Salvation Army in this county. When people are in a crisis, when something happens and they have no where to turn, they are told to talk to The Salvation Army,” she said. “We offer housing assistance, food assistance, spiritual assistance. What are people going to do if we are not there to provide that assistance?”

The Meal Appeal campaign, which raises money for the corps to serve residents year-round, is another cause for concern.

Welch said so far, the amount raised, \$34,000, is not as high as it should be at this point in the campaign. To meet its goal, about \$26,000 will need to be raised before the campaign ends on Jan. 31.

The local corps remains hopeful, however,

“We’re a little behind (our goal), but we still hope to go beyond it,” he said.

In the meantime, as the review approaches, Welch said the local corps will continue to find ways to keep costs down. It has already taken steps to do that by discontinuing its After School Drop In Center program, and reducing food pack contents and the cost of Christmas meal boxes.

Future considerations to cut costs include selling all or part of the two lots and property it owns on East Melendy Street, and a capital campaign to be able to replace the 1924 buildings (two) with one modern, more efficient structure. Currently it uses a church building and an old house. The buildings including the old St. John’s Lutheran Church dating back to 1924, were acquired by The Salvation Army in 1961.

It also may consider applying for more grants and consider establishing an operating endowment and visiting major donors in Mason and Oceana counties.

Wright said the community can help keep the local corps alive, too, by shopping at The Salvation Army store.

“If anyone’s going to be shopping in the next few months, I stress to them to stop by the lovely (The Salvation Army store),” she said. “They can find anything they want, and for such a great deal.”

jkloeckner@ludingtondailynews.com
843-1122 ext 307

GIVE-A-CHRISTMAS: Unemployed ranks seek shelter of Salvation Army

By Christy Strawser

Daily Tribune Staff Writer

PUBLISHED: January 2, 2006

ROYAL OAK — Trapped between two worlds, the young father of three was willing to do anything.

He used to work as a professional, but like many others in this economy he lost his job. Then his wife lost hers, which meant they went from a combined \$80,000 a-year income to nothing.

The father was loathe to take charity, he told staffers at the Salvation Army in Royal Oak, so when unemployment and their savings ran dry he applied for jobs at McDonald's and Burger King — places a world away from his professional life.

They turned him down.

"He told them 'I'll work hard for you,'" recounted Christina Gallop of the Salvation Army, a Give-A-Christmas Year Around recipient. "But they told him he was overqualified, they were worried they would hire him and he would leave right away for a better job."

With no other options, the man came to the Salvation Army and asked for food for his family. The Army doesn't turn away the hungry.

"It was hard for him," Gallop said. "I almost think it's harder for people in situations like that. They fall harder when they're not used to it (poverty)."

Gallop and staffers in other south Oakland charities agree that this story is the most common one they've heard this year. People get laid off, hold on as long as they can, then lose it all.

Leaders of every local charity have seen families that went from the middle class to homelessness. If they were lucky, many got jobs that paid half their former wages, or less, and managed to cling to the fringe.

And when there was nothing else, some could only get help from Give A Christmas funds. Give A Christmas aids Common Ground Sanctuary, the Judson Center, HAVEN, Troy People Concerned, the South Oakland Shelter, Community Services of Oakland, the Boys and Girls Club of South Oakland County, and the South Oakland YMCA. The charity had enough left over the last two years to add the YWCA in Clawson and Gateway Counseling in Madison Heights to the mix.

Together, the groups help the homeless, abused women and children, abandoned or foster children, people with emotional or mental impairment, low-income families, even those who've temporarily fallen on hard economic times and need a little boost to get back on their feet.

Give-A-Christmas organizations are all local agencies that help people in this area. Since there are no administrative costs, donations go to the people who need it most.

We would be happy to announce your contributions, along with your city of residence and a greeting or memory.

Checks should be made to "Give-A-Christmas Year Around" and sent to:

Give-A-Christmas

c/o Daily Tribune

210 E. Third St.

Royal Oak, MI 48067

Until the end of the month, we'll bring readers stories of Give-A-Christmas' generous donors, along with the agencies and people helped by the charity.

We hope the tales warm hearts and spur action on behalf of those who need it the most.

Give A Christmas deadline extended

By Christy Strawser

Royal Oak Daily Tribune Staff Writer

PUBLISHED: January 3, 2006

TROY — It's a new year, which means new funds for many local charities — though they have a lot of catching up to do.

Troy People Concerned ran out of money early in 2005 and the situation got so desperate that when a single mother with a daughter asked for help to keep her small family off the streets before Christmas, the charity had to tell her they couldn't help.

Anastasha Lynn, director of TPC, said she was still worried days later about what happened to the mother and daughter. She gave them phone numbers for other local charities and hoped they found a place to stay.

That chance was slim because all year South Oakland Shelter in Royal Oak turned away at least 20 people a day. There were too many in need and not enough to go around.

"These Troy families have exhausted their unemployment benefits or taken second mortgages out on their homes," TPC wrote in its newsletter. "They have borrowed against their 401K, depleted savings and are in fear of having to make the decision between purchasing food or paying a utility bill."

That's why the Daily Tribune will continue into January to raise money for Give-A-Christmas Year Around, which aids Common Ground Sanctuary, the Judson Center, HAVEN, Troy People Concerned, the South Oakland Shelter, Community Services of Oakland, the Boys and Girls Club of South Oakland County, South Oakland YMCA and the Salvation Army. The charity had enough left over the last two years to add the YWCA in Clawson and Gateway Counseling in Madison Heights to the mix.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Kalamazoo Gazette

Wednesday, January 04, 2006

They all helped make a difference

Talk about a promise. I have a passion for children, and two recent Saturdays I was blessed to be a part of two different children's programs that make a difference for those in need.

The first one was the opportunity to help at the Comstock Community Kids' Christmas party for 100 of the area's less-privileged children. If you could only have seen the grateful expressions on their little faces, you would know that all of the generous donations that came in and made it all possible were well worth giving. Thanks to all of the donors for their generosity, caring, and especially love. The Gull Road Meijer store also is to be commended for allowing us to shop. The volunteers deserve high praise as well.

The additional breakfast and Christmas party I attended was the Kids Hope U.S.A. at the Galesburg Methodist Church. Kids Hope U.S.A. is a mentoring partnership between the Galesburg-Augusta primary and intermediate schools and the Galesburg Methodist Church. As principal of the primary school, I watch as these mentors work with our children, providing them guidance and hope. The commitment they give to these students is invaluable and worthy of great praise. They are perfect examples of what it takes to help others, and they are extremely appreciated.

Both of these important programs are outstanding and worth continuing. If you get a chance to be a part of either one, you will find, as I did, that you get back far more than what you give.

Dee Lapekas
Kalamazoo

FEMA funds grow as county jobs shrink

Wednesday, January 04, 2006

By Pat Rombyer

prombyer@citpat.com -- 768-4924

Jackson County has received an increase in its annual allocation for emergency food and shelter fund from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The county received \$114,055 from FEMA, a 2 percent increase over last year, despite the huge demands for federal funds in the hurricane-devastated South.

The increase shocked Margaret Grose, who helps handle the distribution of local FEMA funds for the United Way of Jackson County, the designated fiscal agency.

"I kept warning people that we might not get as much this year," she said.

"This is a godsend for a lot of people. With Jackson's economy the way it is, there are a lot who have never had to ask for help with their mortgage or their utilities," she said.

The United Way of Jackson County is the designated fiscal agency that will oversee the local distribution of the funds. The money is earmarked for emergency food and shelter.

Grose said the amount is based in part on the unemployment rate in a community.

"Jackson's had a tough time," she said. "The calls I get most frequently are for help with rent, mortgage or utilities."

Nonprofit organizations or local governmental units are eligible to apply for funding.

Organizations must have a demonstrated capability to deliver food and/or shelter; have an accounting system in place; an annual audit; a voluntary board; and practice nondiscrimination.

Groups that have received money in the past include the Salvation Army, Interfaith Shelter, Community Action Agency and Florence Crittenton Services.

To apply, submit proposals to the United Way of Jackson County, 729 W. Michigan Ave., Jackson, MI 49201. The application deadline is 4:30 p.m. Jan. 25. For more information, contact Grose at 796-5121.



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

Richard Bearup appointed staff director for Children's Trust Fund

January 4, 2006

Former Children's Ombudsman and longtime child advocate **Richard Bearup has been appointed executive director of the Children's Trust Fund (CTF)**. CTF Board chair Nancy Moody and Department of Human Services director Marianne Udow announced the appointment today. In that role Bearup will manage the CTF Lansing-based staff, work with its appointed board of directors, local councils and grant recipients, represent the state with national children's organizations, conduct and develop relationships with current and future donors, and oversee all administrative functions of the private nonprofit organization.

The CTF is dedicated to the prevention of child abuse and neglect through public awareness campaigns, training and technical assistance, and funding community-based child abuse prevention programs. The CTF is an independent part of state government administered through Michigan Department of Human Services. The governor appoints its board members.

"Rich Bearup is an outstanding appointment and a wonderful addition to our team working to give children a great start in life," Moody said. Bearup's appointment is effective Jan. 4.

Bearup, who resides in Charlotte, has been involved in Michigan state government either directly or through advocacy since the 1970s. For the past year he has worked for Granholm's office to implement children's programming and related efforts. From 1998-2005 he was chief operating officer for Detroit-based Lutheran Child & Family Services of Michigan, a private agency that provides adoption, foster care, counseling and substance abuse services to about 15,000 children, individuals and families.

From 1995-98 he served as Michigan Children's Ombudsman under Gov. John Engler and was director of Michigan International Year of the Child during 1994-95 for then Lt. Gov. Connie Binsfeld. From 1975-87 Bearup worked in political positions with the Michigan Senate for former Sens. Engler, Gil DiNello and Dick Allen. He holds a bachelor's degree in education from Alma College and took postgraduate study in labor and industrial relations at Michigan State University.

"Rich Bearup will work to expand the network of abuse and neglect prevention initiatives the CTF funds and administers," Udow said. "We are pleased to have him back in state government working for children."

The CTF does not receive a state appropriation. It is funded through revenue from interest income, its trust fund, individual and corporate donations, children's license plate sales, grants and special fundraising activities. In October Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed legislation reinstating the state income tax check-off for CTF that allows taxpayers to donate to the fund. The check-off had been discontinued after 2000.

In 2004 the CTF funded 71 local child abuse and neglect prevention councils, funded 42 community-based direct service prevention programs, and administered 36 secondary prevention programs that collectively provided information and support to more than 444,000 Michigan children and families.

For more information go to www.michigan.gov/dhs